



W H E N T H E S P I R I T M O V E S

African American Dance

in History and Art

African American Dance

continues to shape mainstream American dance. • The story begins in Africa, where dance was and is central to community life. Captive Africans brought their dance to America. It nurtured them in slavery, and they kept its African characteristics alive. After Emancipation, Black entertainers performed on the minstrel and vaudeville stages. They revised and polished ancient steps and older material to popularize dances that many audiences had never seen before. Among these dances were the Cakewalk and Tap. Beginning in the 1930s, African Americans also entered the world of concert dance and left their vivid stamp upon it. • In the early twentieth century, jazz social dances came out of the Black community. America fell in love with these dances, including the Black Bottom, Shimmy, Charleston, and Lindy Hop. • During the 1960s, the Twist and other Black dances became international fads. In recent years, exciting new African American forms, especially Hip Hop, Break Dance, and Step Dance, have emerged. Today, African rhythms and dance characteristics can be seen throughout American dance.



Africa

AFRICA is a large and complex continent, containing more than a thousand cultural groups. At the time of the slave trade, West Africa was home to the Wolof, Ewe, Mende, Bamana, Yoruba, Dogon, and other groups. Each of these cultures was distinctive. Still, they all valued and practiced dance in similar ways. • Dance held great importance in their societies. There were dances to increase crop harvest and to initiate the young into adulthood. People danced to celebrate marriage, birth, and the deceased moving on to the spirit world. Some dances honored ancestors or dramatized religious beliefs. Across West Africa, there were hundreds of purposes and occasions for dance. • Ritual dance was very important. By putting on a mask and costume, a dancer set aside his human identity and portrayed a spirit. Such dancers looked at themselves differently, and the audience felt the difference. The dance became a meeting point between the human and the supernatural worlds, allowing people to communicate with ancestors and deities. In this way, a village sought to keep its people safe and ensure a prosperous future.

▲ **Gelede dance** is performed by the Yoruba to pay homage to the female mother spirit. Through the dance, the village seeks blessings such as children and fertile land. ▼ Wearing several kinds of masks, **Dogon men dance** in a line as they perform a synchronized leap. • Top: ©M. Huet/Hoa-Qui/Photo Researchers, Inc. Bottom: ©Michel Renaudeau/Huet/Hoa-Qui/Photo Researchers, Inc.



Handkerchief Dance



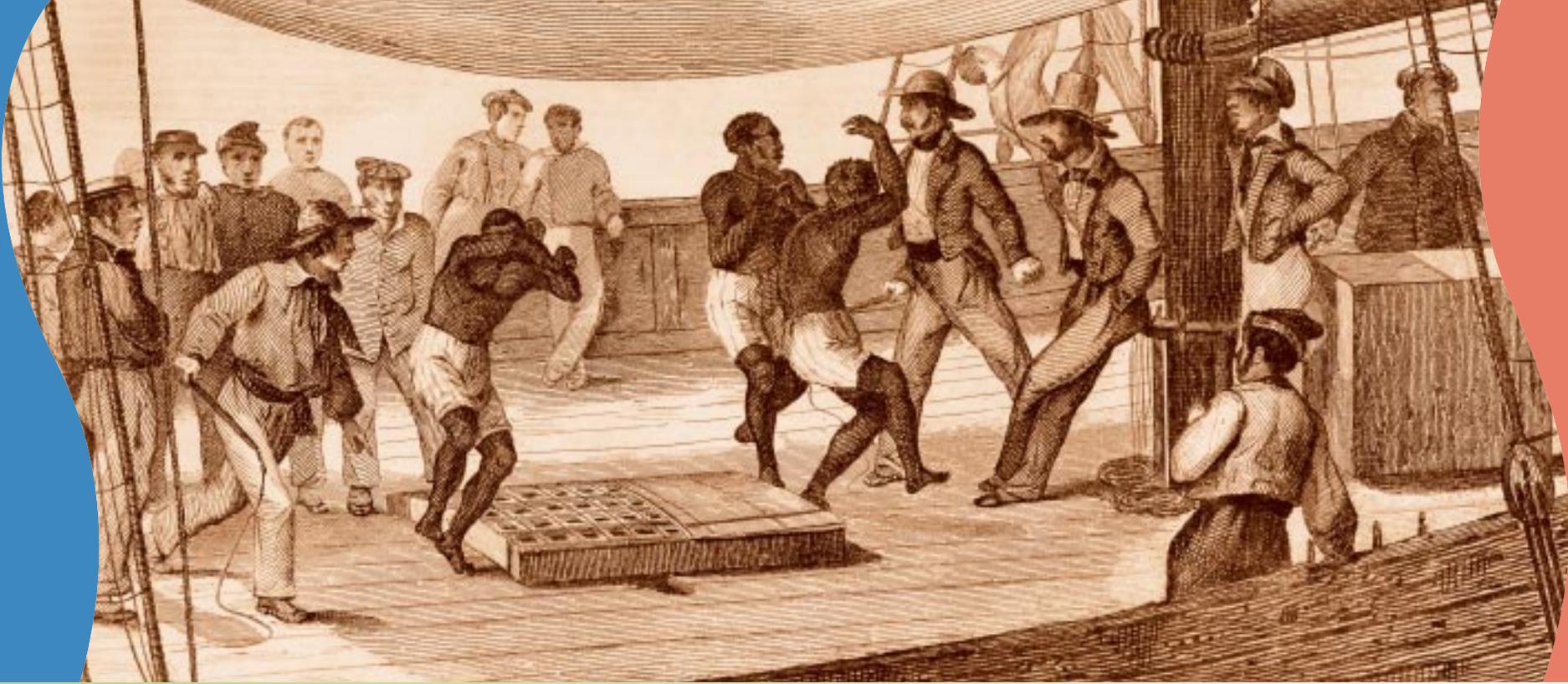
African Dance Characteristics

Black American dance has retained many African dance characteristics, and these have crossed over into mainstream American dance. Among those...

- 1. African movement vocabulary. African dance moves all parts of the body. This movement includes angular bending of the arms and legs, asymmetry and fluidity, scuffing and sliding steps, and shoulder and hip movement.*
- 2. Orientation toward the earth. African dancers often bend their bodies slightly toward the earth, flatten their feet solidly against it, and flex their knees. Compare this to European ballet, in which the arms are uplifted, the back is straight, and the feet are up on the toes.*
- 3. Improvisation. Within the patterns of age-old forms, the African dancer feels free to be creative.*
- 4. Circle and line formations. Both African and European dance included these configurations. This commonality may have encouraged dance exchange.*
- 5. Importance of the community. A dancer danced for and with the community. In return, the community affirmed the dancer through clapping, chanting, singing, and other responses. The call-and-response form marks much of African American music and dance.*
- 6. Polyrhythms. Africans dance to more than one rhythm at a time, and African polyrhythms have strongly marked American music.*
- 7. Percussive music. The drum is a key instrument in West Africa. In America, it continued to provide the strong beat needed for dance. African Americans also used other percussive instruments such as bones, triangle, and a variety of homemade or makeshift instruments. In addition, body percussion, including clapping, patting, and foot tapping, was very important in the Black musical and dance traditions.*
- 8. Pantomime. African dance imitates the movements of life. Dance reflects animal behavior, human work, and spiritual or mythic events. African American pantomime dances include the Buzzard Lope, Snake Hips, Swim, and Stroll.*
- 9. Something in hand. Africans use special objects in dance. Among these are masks, strips of cloth, sticks or staffs, and other symbolic items. In America, Blacks danced with hats, canes, handkerchiefs, and even chairs.*
- 10. Competitive dance. Widespread in Africa, this tradition came to America. Its expressions included early forms of competitive dance called cutting contests, as well as Tap competitions, Jitterbug contests, Break Dance rivalries, Step Dance shows, and a host of other events.*

Above: Asante "Handkerchief Dance" performed by women and girls in a circle, holding pieces of cloth. The dancers bend slightly toward the earth. They are surrounded by their community, and drummers keep up a polyrhythmic beat.

Handkerchief Dance, late nineteenth century. Print. Barbara Glass Collection.



Middle Passage and Early American Dance

Until 1808, United States law allowed captive Africans to be brought into the country and sold as slaves. After that date, an illegal trade in human cargo continued until the Civil War. Conditions aboard slave ships were brutal and a large number of people died during the voyage across the Atlantic. • Despite the horrific Middle Passage, and the fact that enslaved Blacks arrived without possessions, they brought their culture to the Americas. Subsequently, this culture exerted a powerful shaping influence on mainstream America. • One such tradition—a religious dance called the Ring Shout—has survived into the present. It probably developed from older circle dances as Africans became African Americans. In the early 1800s, it became part of some Black Christian services, allowing slaves to worship in an African way. • Participants sing call-and-response songs while moving in a circle. As they sing, they often pantomime the action of the song. In "Oh, Eve, Where is Adam," for example, dancers bend slightly forward as they move around in a circle pretending to pick up leaves from the ground as they sing, "Pickin' up leaves, pickin' up leaves." Other worshippers sit on the side, singing and clapping, as a person beats time with a stick.

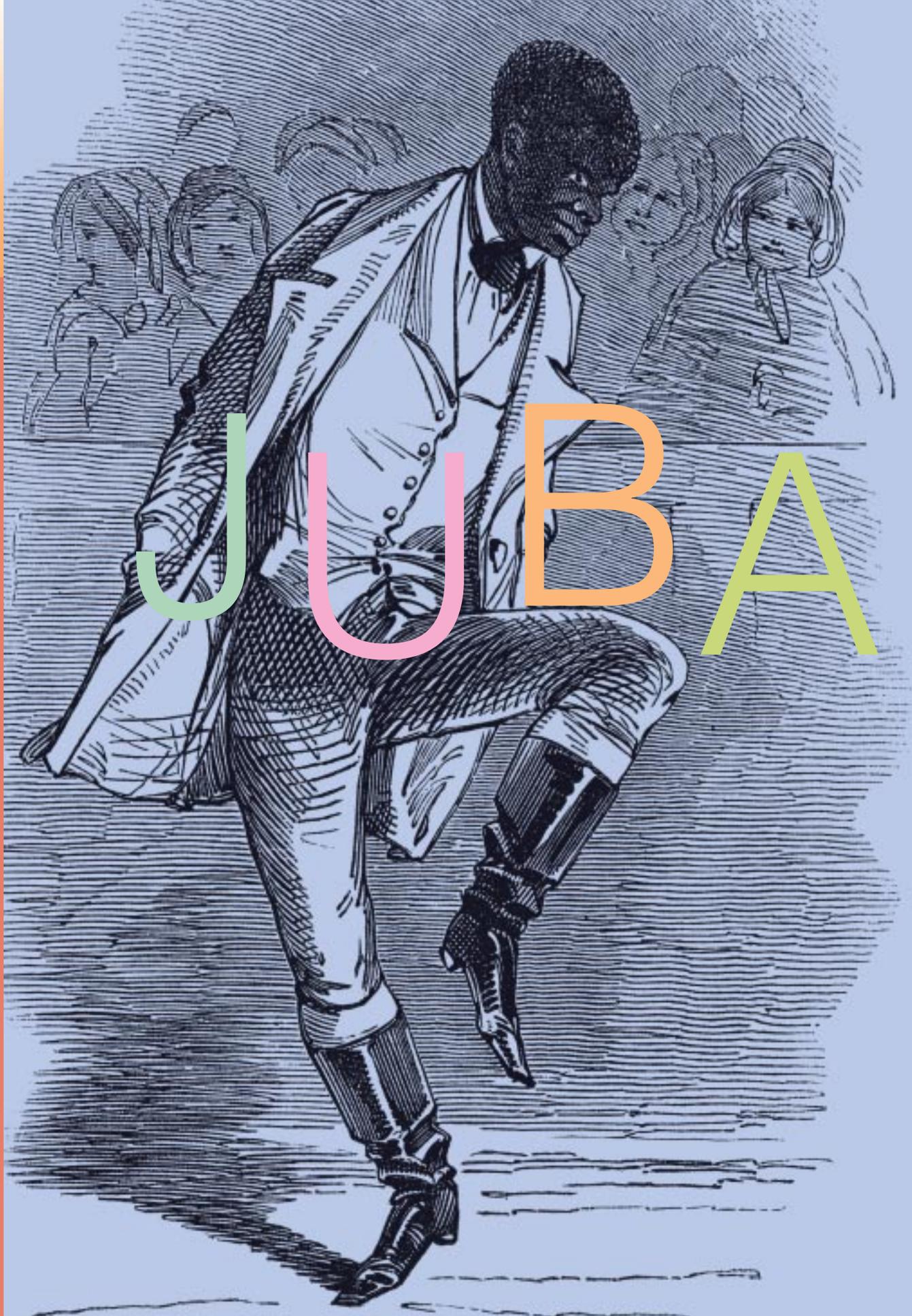
Percussive Footwork Dance

AFRICAN AMERICAN percussive dance has its roots in Africa.

In this kind of dance, the performer's feet created a percussive sound against a wooden base. In fact, many Black dancers carried small portable wood platforms called "shingles" to dance on.

- Juba was an important type of this dance. Often a challenge or competitive dance, it included rapid, fancy sliding and scuffing steps and heel and toe tapping. Two people danced it opposite each other.

There were other black footwork dances, too, and some of these were performed solo or by people taking turns. The varied types blended in time, labeled **Breakdown** or **Jig**. Eventually, these forms gave rise to Tap Dance.



▲ *William Henry Lane, known as "Master Juba," performs. The word Juba was also applied to dancers. Through competitions in New York, Lane became "the greatest dancer known." He then traveled to England, where he danced to great acclaim.*

Right: *Juba at Vauxhall Gardens*. *London Illustrated News*, August 5, 1848. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Below left: *Plantation Dance*. Illustration. *Century Magazine*, October, 1882. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Below right: *Der dey was, de whol kit 'n' bile uv 'em.* Lithograph, 1916. Walter Biggs. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.



The Minstrel Show

The blackface minstrel show, beginning in the 1830s, was the most popular form of entertainment in the United States for more than fifty years. The genre was especially important in the North. White actors dressed up as Blacks and imitated Black song and dance. In this way, the genre claimed to give access to Black culture, while actually offering false, comic versions of it. The minstrel show also idealized slavery, depicting slaves as happy. Minstrel images thus relieved northern guilt, while shaping negative racial stereotypes that lasted more than a century. • After Emancipation, show business was one of the few occupations open to Blacks. They found, however, that they had to put on blackface makeup and enact stereotypes to get work. Audiences were used to the minstrel format, and Black entertainers had to work for decades to change it.

J. M. BUSBY'S WORLD'S GREATEST COLORED MINSTRELS

PRICE 25c WILL ROSSITER
THE CHICAGO PUBLISHER
138 W. LAKE ST. CHICAGO, ILL.

BLACK PATTI TROUBADOURS

THE BUCK-DANCING CONTEST

◀ A poster advertising a typical Black minstrel show.
 ▲ **Black Patti** was the stage name of Sissieretta Jones, a classical singer. She led a successful traveling minstrel show. Her broadsides advertised dance contests, cakewalking, and her own operatic singing.



AL. G. FIELD GREATER MINSTRELS

OLDEST, BIGGEST, BEST

DOC QUIGLEY'S
LATEST CREATION THE DA... PROFESSORS.

▲ Some Black minstrel troupes traveled with circuses or carnivals. In this image, a tent is behind the entertainers and the corner of another tent can be seen to the right. Dancers perform on platforms to draw an audience. The man at the podium is encouraging White onlookers to see the show inside. Right: A poster advertising a typical White minstrel show. White actors appear in street clothing across the top of the image. Below are the same actors performing in blackface and costume.



▲ By 1900, many traveling Black entertainers had thrown off the trappings of minstrelsy. These musicians, for example, are well dressed. They do not carry the banjo, bones, tambourine, and fiddle—the instruments of the minstrel show. Instead, they are a well-equipped brass band. They pose in front of their own train car, in which they probably ate and slept. At the time, Blacks were excluded from most public lodging.

Top left: Advertising brochure, **J. M. Busby's Minstrels**, ca. 1890. Barbara Glass Collection. Top right: **Black Patti Troubadours**. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Middle left: **Georgia Minstrals**, National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Middle right: **Al G. Field Greater Minstrels**. ©CORBIS. Bottom: **Richards and Pringles troupe**, ca. late nineteenth century. Barbara Glass Collection.



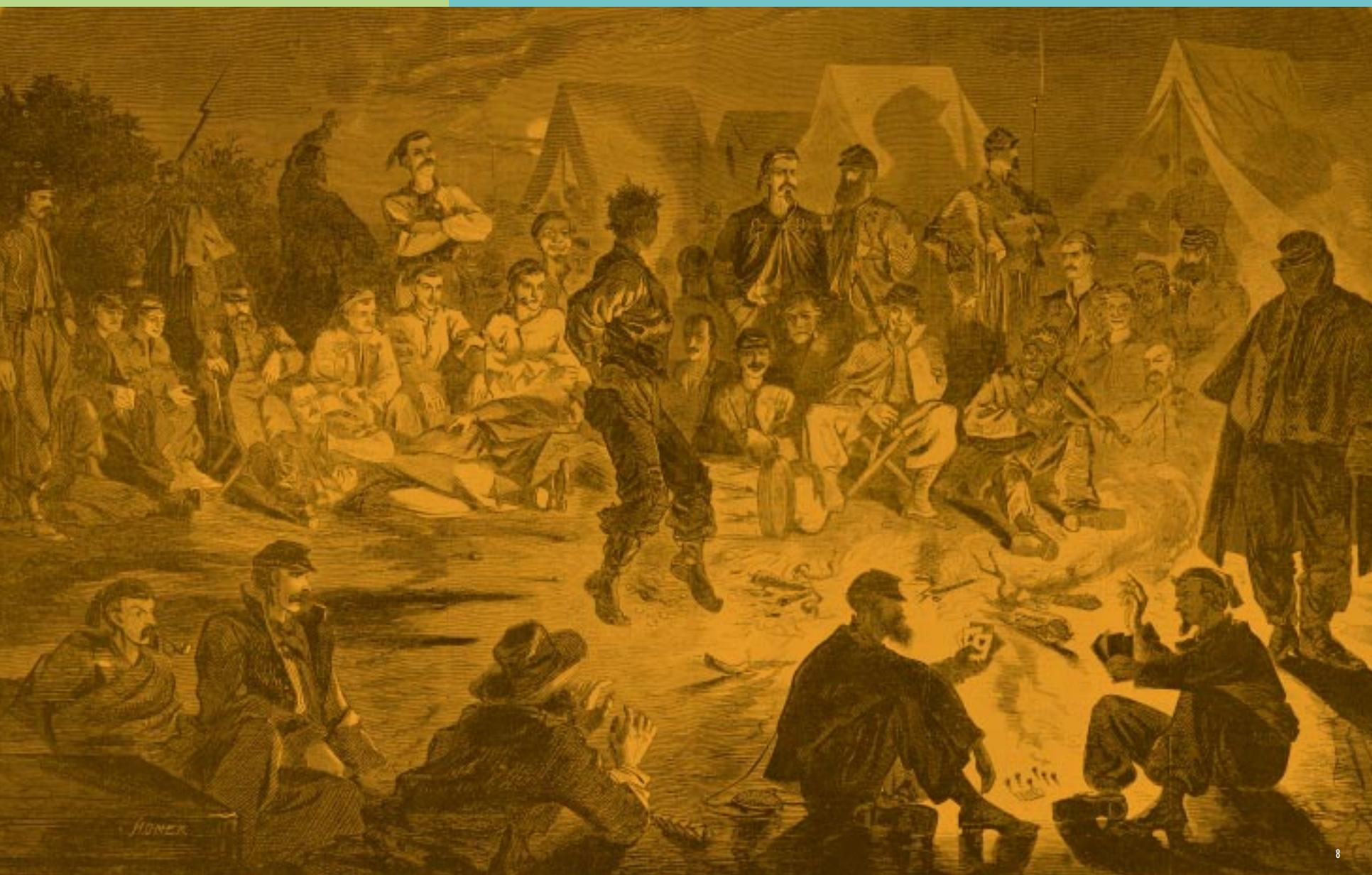
“The negroes preserve all their African fondness for music and dancing, and in the modified form which they have assumed here have given rise to negro dancing and melodies in our theatres, a form of amusement which has enriched many. But the colored people should be seen in one of their own balls to enjoy the reality. The character of the music and the dance; the strange gradations of colors.... There is in these negro balls one thing which cannot fail to impress any observer. Coming as they all do from a degraded and oppressed class, the negroes assume nevertheless,...the manners and language of the best classes in society There is an appreciation of refinement and an endeavor to attain it which we seldom see in the same class of whites.”

A New Year's Day Contraband Ball, At Vicksburg, Mississippi. *Harper's Weekly*

Northerners Learn More About Black Dance

THE CIVIL WAR EXPOSED MANY NORTHERNERS TO authentic Black culture for the first time. Union soldiers invaded the South, and escaped slaves followed the troops. Considered contraband of war, these Blacks were allowed to set up camp near the soldiers. Thousands of contraband Blacks contributed valuable services to the Union Army. They foraged for food for the troops, provided vital information, and did hard physical labor. In the evenings and during free time, the contrabands danced and entertained the Union soldiers.

Top: **A New Year's Day Contraband Ball at Vicksburg, Mississippi,** Harper's Weekly. Courtesy National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Bottom: **A Bivouac Fire on the Potomac.** Engraving, Winslow Homer, Harper's Weekly, December 21, 1861. Courtesy National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.





The Cakewalk

The Cakewalk, essentially a strut, was performed with shoulders thrown back, head held high, the body swaying slightly backward, and feet kicking forward. Originally called Walk the Chalkline, it was a competition dance during the slavery era. The winner often received a cake, giving the dance its name. Some ex-slaves later disclosed that the dance began as a satire on pretentious Whites. Thus the Cakewalk was both a pantomime and an African-style dance of derision. • The Cakewalk was taken up by minstrel shows, which presented comic versions of the dance. Black minstrels, however, performed it in elegant dress to ragtime music, often as a line dance. In 1898, the Black Broadway musical *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk* popularized the dance among mainstream audiences. By the early 1900s, it had become an international dance craze.

Top: A White European couple dances the Cakewalk after it crossed the color line and became a mainstream phenomenon.



Social Dance to Jazz Music

IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, African American dances, done to jazz music, became popular among Whites. Mainstream audiences saw the dances in the Black Broadway musical or the Black nightclub show. These musicals and nightclub acts often originated in New York and then toured the nation. • The most popular dances were the Shimmy, Charleston, Black Bottom, Ballin' the Jack, Big Apple, and Lindy Hop. They had come out of the honky-tonks, barrel houses, house parties, and jooks of the Black South. The jook, or small, rural Black club, was an especially important context for Black dance preservation and innovation. The dances traveled North with migrating workers. By the late 1930s, the Lindy Hop had been renamed the Jitterbug and was being danced to swing music.

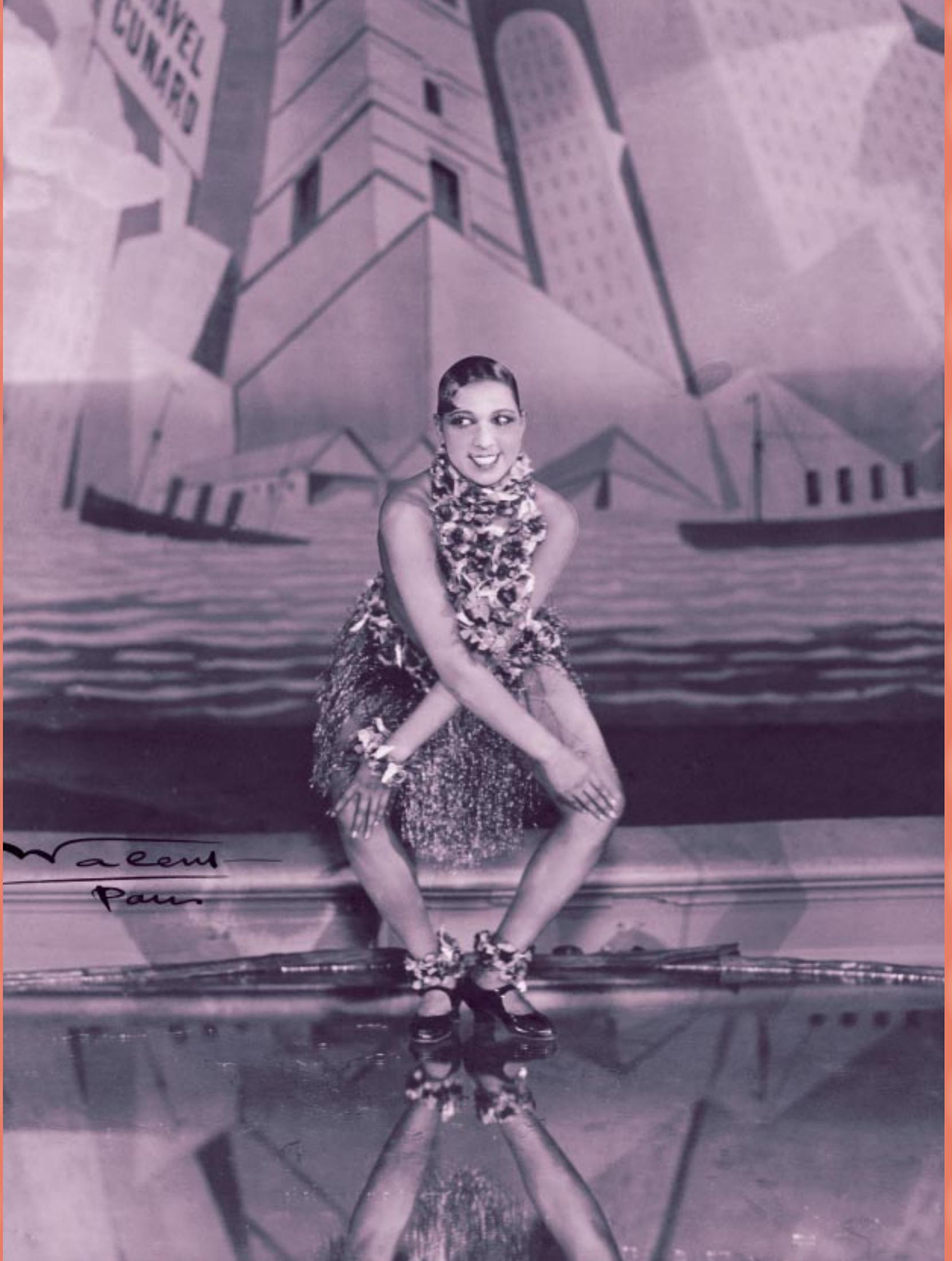
These **Lindy dancers** are doing an air step, a move in which one dancer leaves the ground through a flip or leap.



Above: Dancers **jitterbugging** in a Jook Joint in Clarksdale, Mississippi. • Left: A group of African American high school students created **The Big Apple** in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1936. They named it after the Black nightclub, a former Black church, where they practiced it. The Big Apple is performed in a circle. A caller gives directions and dancers do steps in a counterclockwise direction (counterclockwise dance is an African tradition). The steps are frequently taken from other swing dances such as the Lindy, Shag, or Truckin'. • Middle left: By 1937, the Big Apple had crossed over color lines and become popular in mainstream culture. • Middle right: **Dancing in the street with a marching band** is a New Orleans tradition. From early times in the city, Whites, Blacks, and Creoles all had their social, professional, and fraternal clubs. Some of those served as burial societies. This custom came in part from Africa, where many people belong to societies that provide burial. Funerals included music and dancing by society members, a custom that continues in New Orleans. • Bottom: A young Joan Crawford demonstrates the steps to the **Black Bottom**. Crawford danced the Charleston in the movie *Our Dancing Daughters*. • Bottom right: Champions James F. and Louise Sullivan dancing the **Charleston** at the National Championship in Chicago, Illinois.

Row one: **Juke Joint**. ©CORBIS. Row two: **The Big Apple**. *Stage Magazine*, October, 1937. Courtesy National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Row three left: **The Big Apple**. ©Bettmann/CORBIS Row three right: **Street Dancing**, New Orleans. Ralston Crawford Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans. Row four left: Joan Crawford dancing the **Black Bottom**, 1928. Perrin Kennedy. Courtesy Barbara Glass Collection. Row four right: **National Charleston champions**. Getty Images.



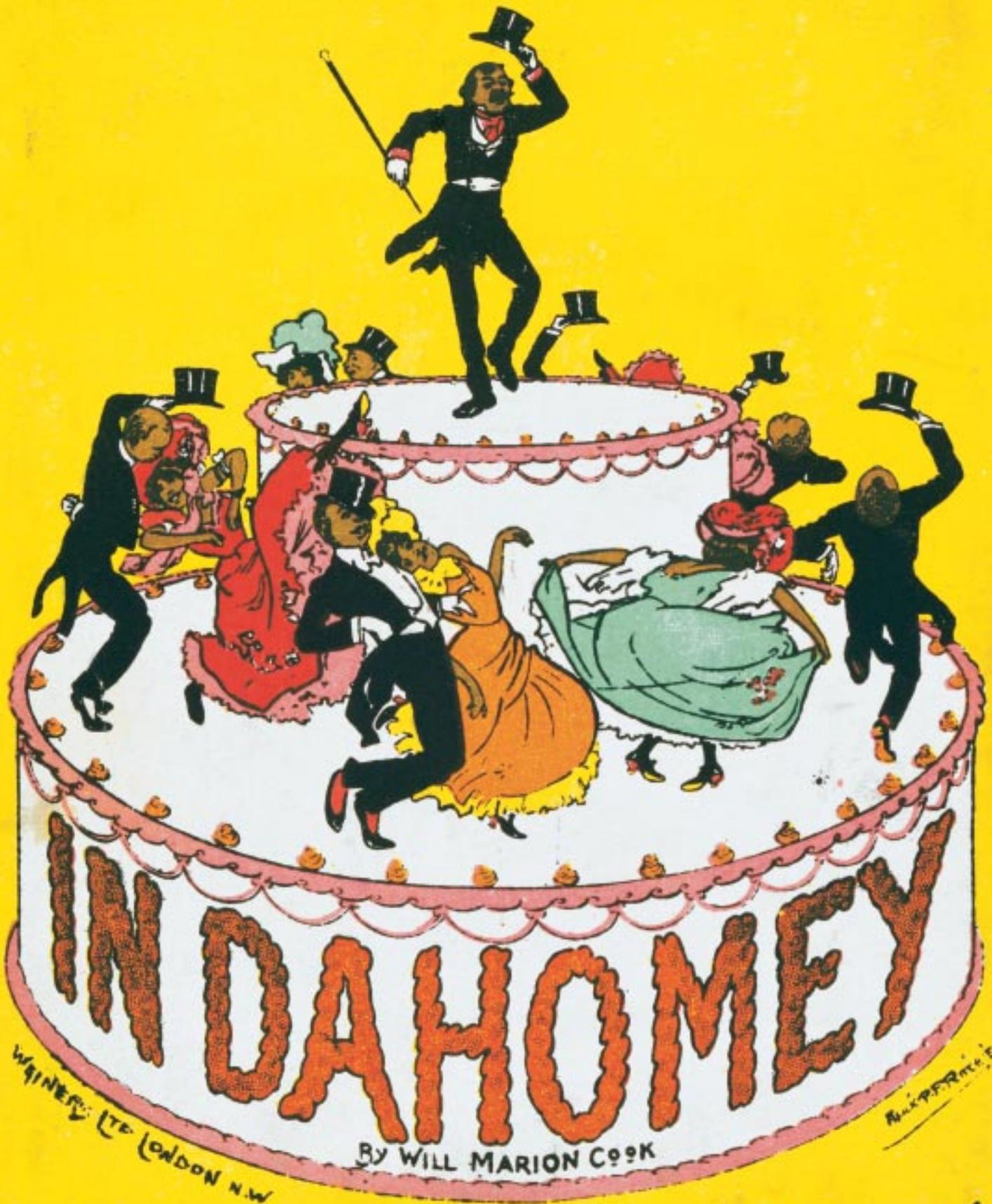


Early Black Broadway

BEGINNING WITH THE 1898 SHOW *Clorindy*, Black musicals popularized African American dances among mainstream audiences. After seeing the Charleston, Black Bottom, Shimmy, and Lindy Hop performed on stage, Whites began dancing them at parties and in clubs. • Black Broadway also brought African American tap dance and concert dance to the attention of a broader audience. Touring versions of Broadway shows helped showcase African American arts and culture throughout the world.

Josephine Baker doing the Charleston. Baker first drew attention to her dancing in the Black musical *Shuffle Along*. She later traveled to Paris and became a popular entertainer there.

THEATRE ROYAL, BRADFORD,
MONDAY, DEC. 5th, 1904. For Six Nights.



◀ *In Dahomey* was a Black Broadway hit that included a performance of the Cakewalk. The show traveled to England in 1903, where it played to large audiences. The British especially loved the Cakewalk by George Walker, Aida Overton Walker, and Bert Williams. In June, the cast was summoned to Buckingham Palace for a performance. Later, the British press reported, members of the royal family Cakewalked on the palace lawn. Shortly afterward, the dance swept Europe. • *In Dahomey* was still touring England in 1904, as audiences wanted to see the Cakewalk.

In Dahomey at the Theatre Royal, Bradford. British Advertising Postcard, ca. 1904. Barbara Glass Collection.

Bottom left: **Florence Mills** was one of the stars of the smash hit *Shuffle Along*, an all-Black Broadway musical that opened in 1921. The show presented swinging jazz music, tap dance, acrobatic dance, eccentric dance, and the Soft Shoe. • Audiences loved the syncopated rhythms, the high-speed dance, and the comic routines. They also loved the mugging of Josephine Baker, a young chorus girl. Mayor LaGuardia enjoyed the show so much he came to see it three times in one week. The city traffic department had to make the street outside the theatre one-way. After its run in New York, the show toured the country.

Florence Mills. Edwin Stecher/Panor Photo. ©Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

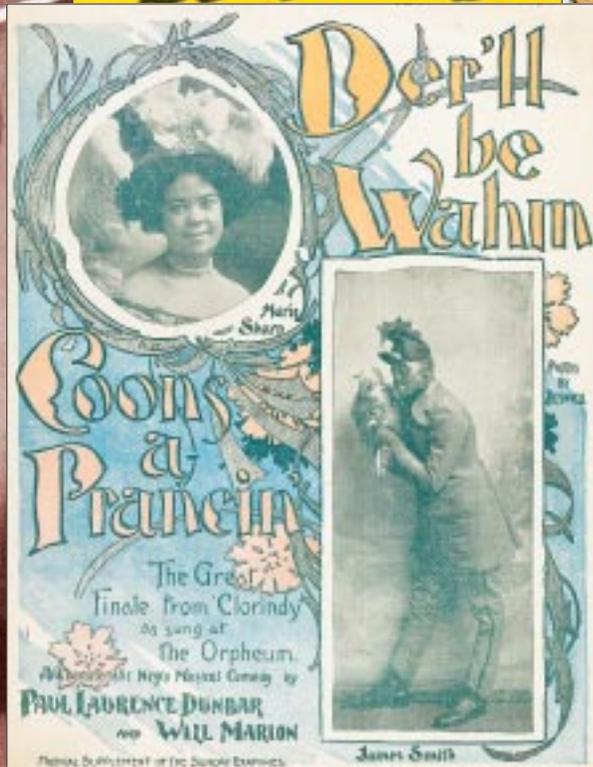
Bottom middle: **Clorindy** was a Black Broadway show that featured the Cakewalk. This sheet music is a version of *Clorindy's* hit finale, "Darktown is Out Tonight." The song's title was prophetic—Black culture was indeed "out" and would become more and more influential in shaping mainstream American culture.

"Der'll Be Wahm Coons A'Prancin'." Sheet Music from *Clorindy*, or the Origin of the Cakewalk. Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Will Marion Cook, 1898. Barbara Glass Collection.

Bottom right: "**I'm Just Wild About Harry**" was one of several hit songs to emerge from *Shuffle Along*. It later became the theme song of Harry Truman's presidential campaign.

"I'm Just Wild About Harry." Sheet Music, 1921. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.

Don't forget to see the real cake walk when it comes to your town Dan & Co.

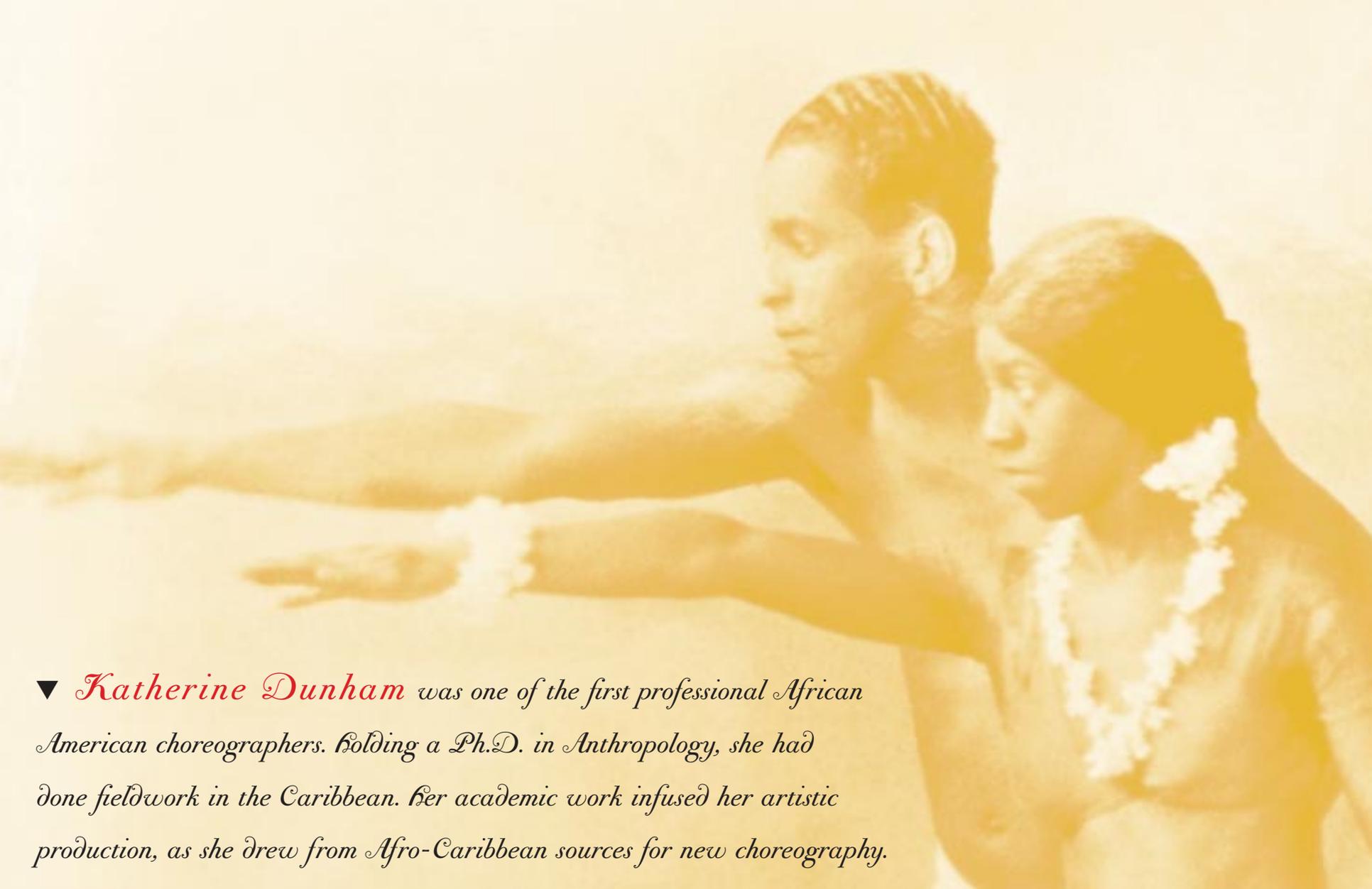




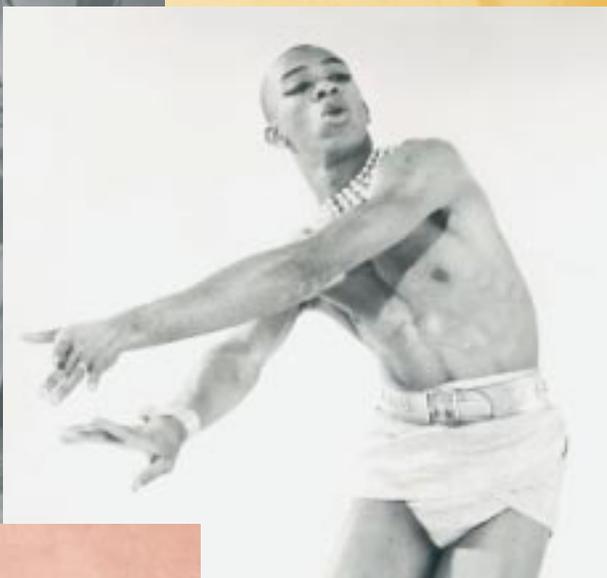
Early Concert and Neo-African Dance

BY THE 1930s, African American concert dance companies had emerged, presenting original works as well as Neo-African dance. African dance was also presented by Africans living in the United States. All these performances attracted substantial audiences and marked the beginning of a growing American interest in Black concert dance and traditional African dance.

Charles Moore performing Asadata Dafora's *Ostrich*. This work is an excellent example of the African tradition of pantomime in dance, vividly recreating the movement of the bird.



▼ *Katherine Dunham* was one of the first professional African American choreographers. Holding a Ph.D. in Anthropology, she had done fieldwork in the Caribbean. Her academic work infused her artistic production, as she drew from Afro-Caribbean sources for new choreography.



▲ Pioneering concert dancer-choreographer **Hemsley Winfield** appears here with his dance company in *Primitive Dance—Life and Death*. Winfield died shortly after this performance, at age 27.

▼ **Pearl Primus** was pursuing post-graduate work in biology when she became interested in modern dance. Exhibiting strong natural talent, she traveled to Africa to study African dance and culture. Later, she focused heavily on African themes in her dance.

► **Asadata Dafora** was a native of Sierra Leone who came to New York City in 1929. He had studied voice in Italy and Germany. Dafora drew on the Mende dance traditions of his homeland to create the dance drama *Kykunkor*. Middle: Acclaimed dancer-choreographer **Geoffrey Holder** is also known for his painting and design.



Background: **Hemsley Winfield and Dancer**. Martinus Andersen, 1938. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Joe Nash Collection. Top: **Katherine Dunham**. TimePix. Right: **Asadata Dafora** as Bridegroom in *Kykunkor*. Joe Nash Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Middle: **Geoffrey Holder**. Courtesy of Geoffrey Holder. Far right: **Pearl Primus**, 1943. Joe Nash Collection.



Medicine shows often employed Black entertainers to draw audiences for sales spiels. The “doctor” sits onstage with Black musicians. Above them are advertisements for his medicinal cactus compound.

Top: Pizaro Medicine Show, ca.1900. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Below: High Glass Vaudeville Show, ca.1900. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Courtesy Walter Dean Myers Archives. Barbara Glass Collection.

A Black vaudeville show at a carnival or circus. The troupe of pretty girls, marching band, and a dancer pose outdoors, while a barker encourages people to purchase tickets.



Early Black Theatrical Dance



AROUND 1900, THE OLD MINSTREL SHOW began to decline, and new forms grew up to take its place. Black vaudeville began in the traveling shows of the late 1800s. Some of these were part of circuses, carnivals, or medicine shows. These entertainment forms were more loosely organized, presenting a series of variety acts and/or attractions, often in continuous performances.

◀ *King Rastus Brown* was a superb Buck dancer who traveled for a time with Black Patti's Troubadours in its later years. Buck dance was a plantation dance that became an important source for Tap.



Clarence "Snowball" Whittier is performing in a Franchon and Marco Production with several other performers.



The nightclub, ballroom, and house party were all enormously important in the development of Black dance, as well as its continuing crossover into mainstream culture. • As African Americans migrated northward, they faced housing discrimination. For most Blacks, the result was that they paid higher rent than Whites, for lower quality housing. If a Black family faced the end of the month without money to pay their rent, they might host a rent party. In exchange for an admission fee, they provided music, food, drink, and the opportunity to dance. The profits helped pay the rent.

Ballrooms, Nightclubs,

Vaudeville performers Margot Webb and Harold Norton presented ballroom dance, among other forms, to audiences across the U.S. and abroad. Throughout the country, ordinary African Americans were also dancing traditional European ballroom forms. They danced to the African-based rhythms of jazz and swing music, often at dance events set up by African American clubs and organizations.

Inset: *House-Rent Party*, Lobby Card, 1946. John Kirsch, A Separate Cinema.
Left: *Norton and Margot*. Photograph, ca. 1930s. Barbara Glass Collection.

During the 1920s and 30s, the Cotton Club was a major Harlem night spot. The club served only White patrons. Despite this discrimination, the Cotton Club promoted Black talent by showcasing it to White audiences. The club presented lavish, star-studded revues and had perhaps the finest chorus girls in the nation. Jazz music from Duke Ellington's orchestra was broadcast from the Cotton Club around the country via radio. • The audience included the cream of high society. Movie stars, politicians, and socialites traveled from affluent neighborhoods to see the show.



and House Parties

The Savoy Ballroom in Harlem billed itself as “the home of happy feet.” Its steady patrons tended to be excellent dancers, and a number of important dances were created or perfected on its dance floor. Over three decades, about 250 big bands played the Savoy, and they found its savvy patrons a very demanding audience. The Savoy's famous battles of the bands pitted one band against another and spurred both to their highest achievements.



Top: Cotton Club Dancers. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.
Bottom: Dancers at the Savoy Room. AP/Wide World.



Bill Robinson was an accomplished tap dancer who began performing on street corners as a child. He joined a traveling show at twelve. By the time he was discovered by Hollywood, he was past fifty and had been a star on Black vaudeville circuits for decades. Dancing on stairs was one of his trademark performances. • His contributions to tap were significant. He brought it up on its toes in a swinging rhythm, making it a lighter, more elegant dance form. His perfect timing was legendary, and his taps, laid down in varying pitches, made their own jazz music. Blessed with the showmanship to make audiences recognize and appreciate his art, he was the first African American dance star familiar to national White audiences. His work opened doors and increased opportunities for other Black dancers.



The Berry Brothers were a superb Flash Act, performing *Soft Shoe* with breathtakingly impressive routines. They were the first to perform splits, and were widely imitated. In one routine, two of the brothers leapt off a platform twelve feet in the air, flew over the heads of Cab Calloway's orchestra, and landed in splits. At the same second, the third brother came up from a twisting somersault and landed in splits, too. That was Flash.

Salt and Pepper was an excellent Black female Tap duo. Other outstanding Black female dancers included Jeni LeGon, Maud Mills, Alice Whitman, and Frances Nealy. Many tapped in nightclub or Broadway chorus lines.



John Subbles and "Buck" Washington teamed up when they were only six and ten. They developed comedy routines in which Buck did eccentric dance and played the piano for Subbles' dancing. Subbles became known for his astonishingly fast and flashy tap steps that no one could steal. In 1922, Subbles created a new style called Rhythm Tap, tapping out rhythms that anticipated the swing sound by more than a decade.



Tap Dance

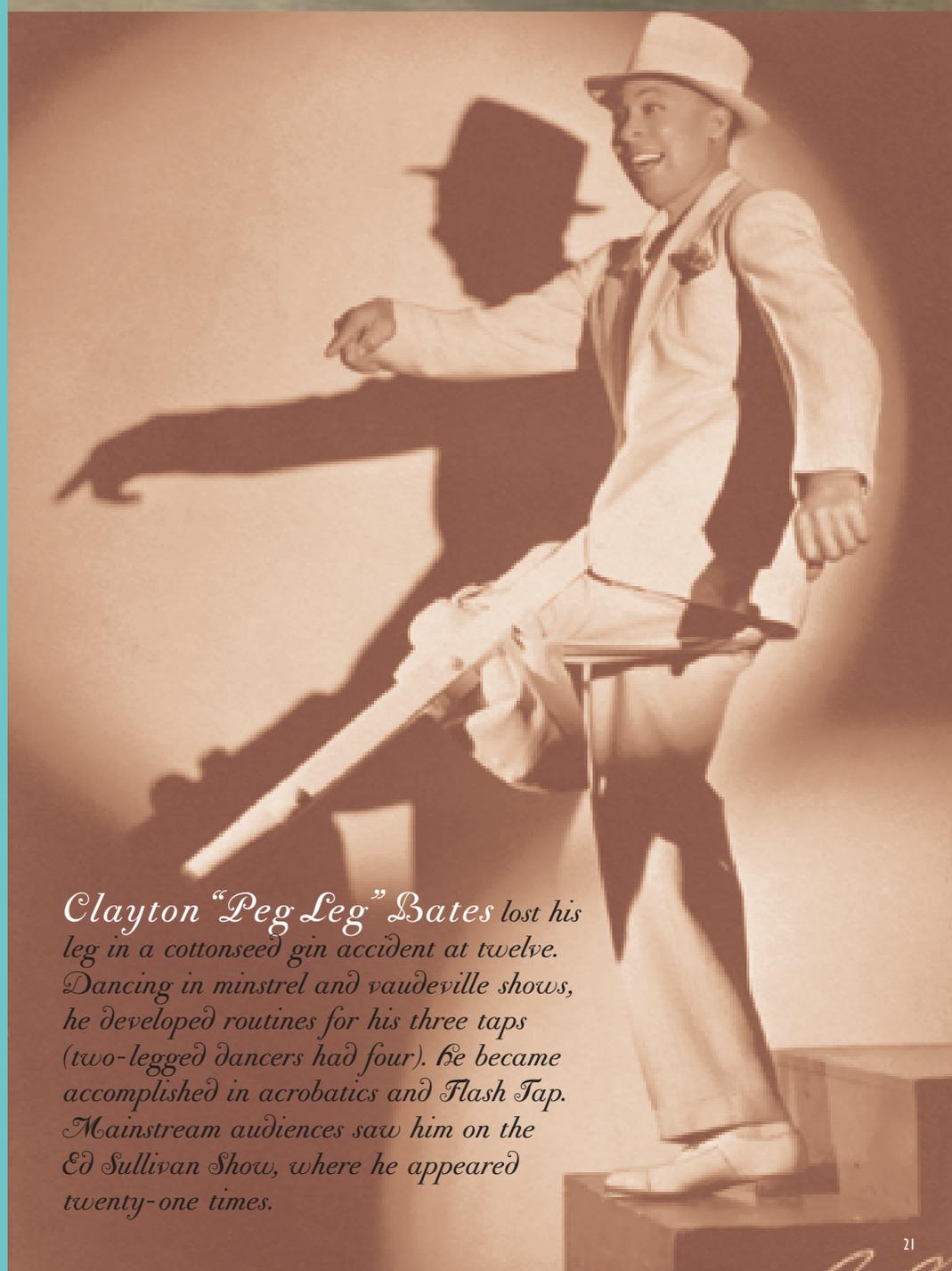
TAP IS A DANCE FORM THAT grew up in the United States.

During the late 1800s, tap developed from older African American sources. Black dancers had always used body percussion, including foot percussion, in dance. Working on a wooden platform, they created syncopated rhythms with their feet. • A variety of Black footwork forms blended into tap, and the Irish jig influenced it as well. Irish and Black dancers had competed against each other since the mid-1800s. Both were also present in the minstrel and vaudeville shows. Although the theatre of the period was segregated, Black and White dancers observed and affected each other.

• With shoe taps, jazz rhythms, and extraordinary levels of improvisation and competition among dancers, this dance quickly developed complexity and a variety of forms.

Above: Acrobatic and Flash Tap dancers **Fayard and Harold Nicholas** dancing in the film *Sun Valley Serenade*.

Top: **The Nicholas Brothers** ca. 1941. ©Bettmann/Corbis. Bottom: **Peg Leg Bates**. Photograph, ca. 1930s. Frank Schifman Apollo Theater Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



Clayton "Peg Leg" Bates lost his leg in a cottonseed gin accident at twelve. Dancing in minstrel and vaudeville shows, he developed routines for his three taps (two-legged dancers had four). He became accomplished in acrobatics and Flash Tap. Mainstream audiences saw him on the Ed Sullivan Show, where he appeared twenty-one times.



Late Twentieth Century Social Dances

ROCK 'N' ROLL MUSIC, a mainstream phenomenon in the 1950s, adopted African American music characteristics in its strong beat, offbeat accents, and polyrhythmic complexity. The dances of the period continued the African American dance aesthetic. Many were pantomime dances like the Monkey, Jerk, Dog, Swim, and Stroll. Improvisation, polyrhythms, percussion, and fluid movement were all basic to the new dances. Many came out of the Black community and most contained movements from older African American dances. • Television broadcast them through the new teen dance shows, and a whole generation learned African American dances in family living rooms. Through television and the movies, these dances had a massive, direct impact on American culture.

The Twist was a national and international dance fad launched by Chubby Checker when he performed it on *The Dick Clark Show* in 1960.



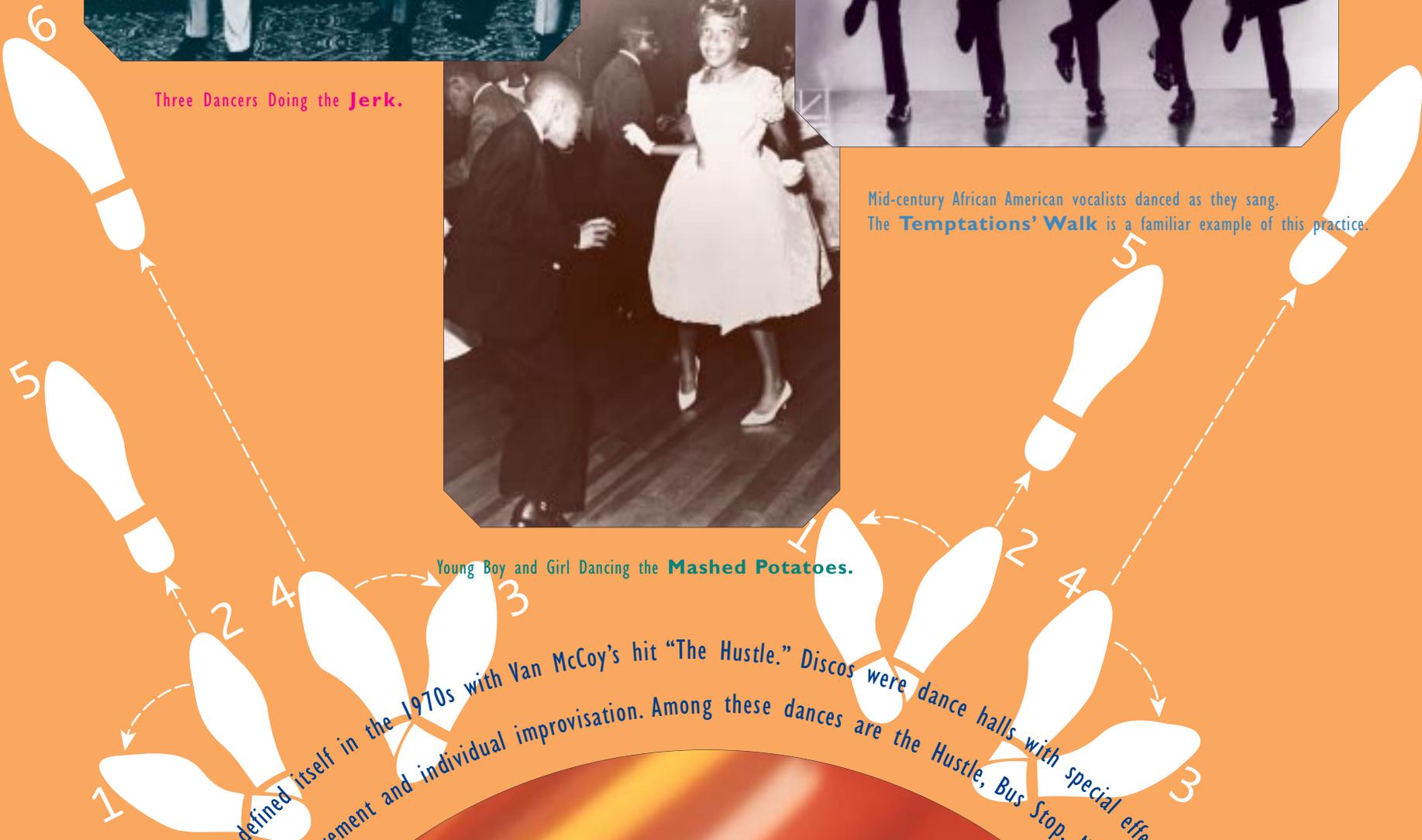
Three Dancers Doing the **Jerk**.



Mid-century African American vocalists danced as they sang. The **Temptations' Walk** is a familiar example of this practice.



Young Boy and Girl Dancing the **Mashed Potatoes**.



The disco sound defined itself in the 1970s with Van McCoy's hit "The Hustle." Discos were dance halls with special effects that reflected the electronic age—changing patterns of light and color, mirrored and faceted balls suspended from the ceiling, dance floors lighted from underneath, and sound systems operated by on-site disc jockeys. • Disco music has a driving beat, and related dance emphasizes hip movement and individual improvisation. Among these dances are the Hustle, Bus Stop, New Yorker, Double Strut, and Chicago Loop.





Hip Hop, Break Dance, and Step Dance

HIP HOP was born in urban America. It is generally known as an acrobatic form of street dance. It includes difficult moves such as flips, leaps, spins, and slides. Breakin' is a type of Hip Hop. It emerged in the 1970s, taking its name from the "break" in the deejay record spin. During this break, dancers performed difficult freestyle moves that could include acrobatics. Breakin' crews or gangs competed with each other through dance.

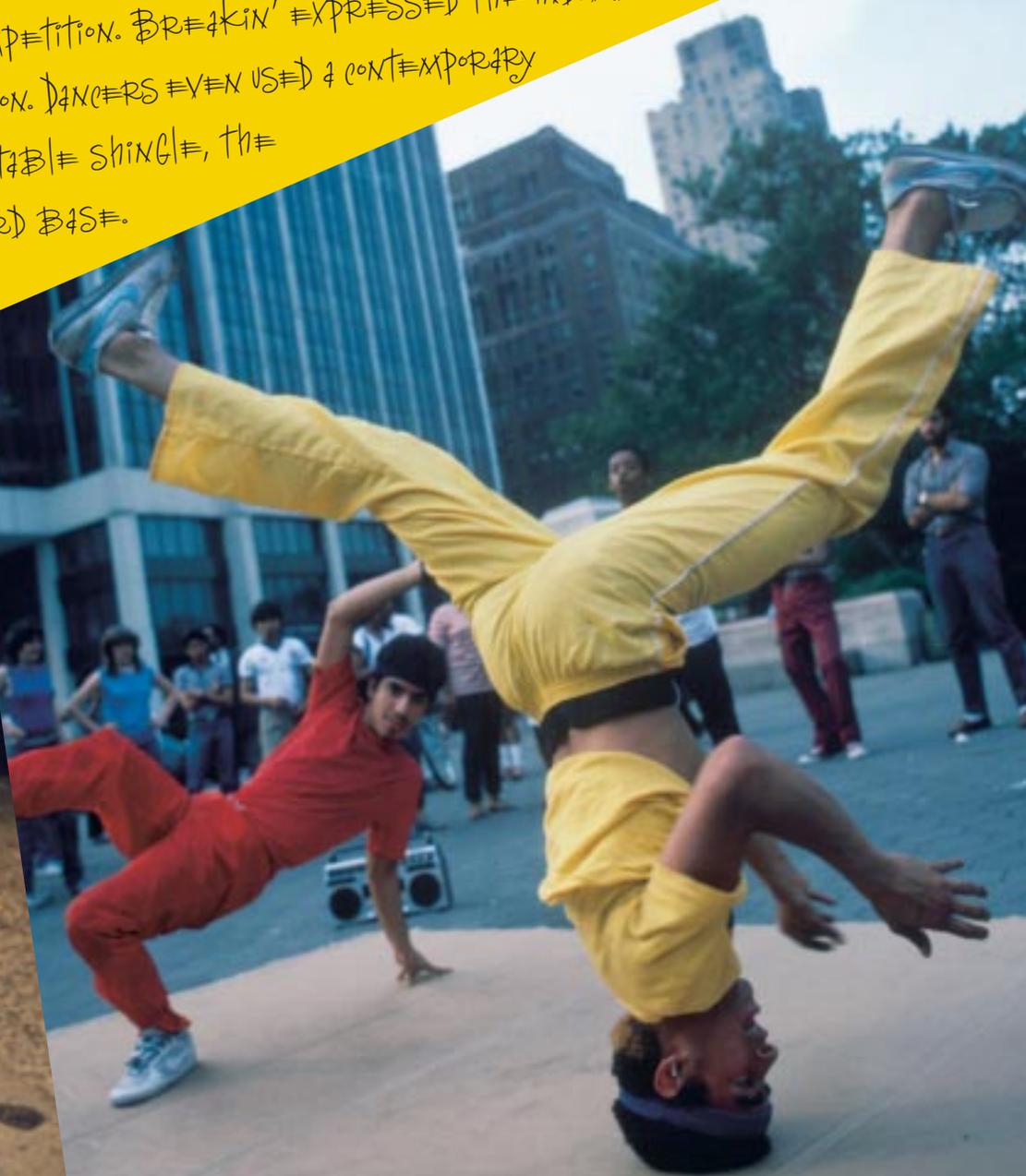
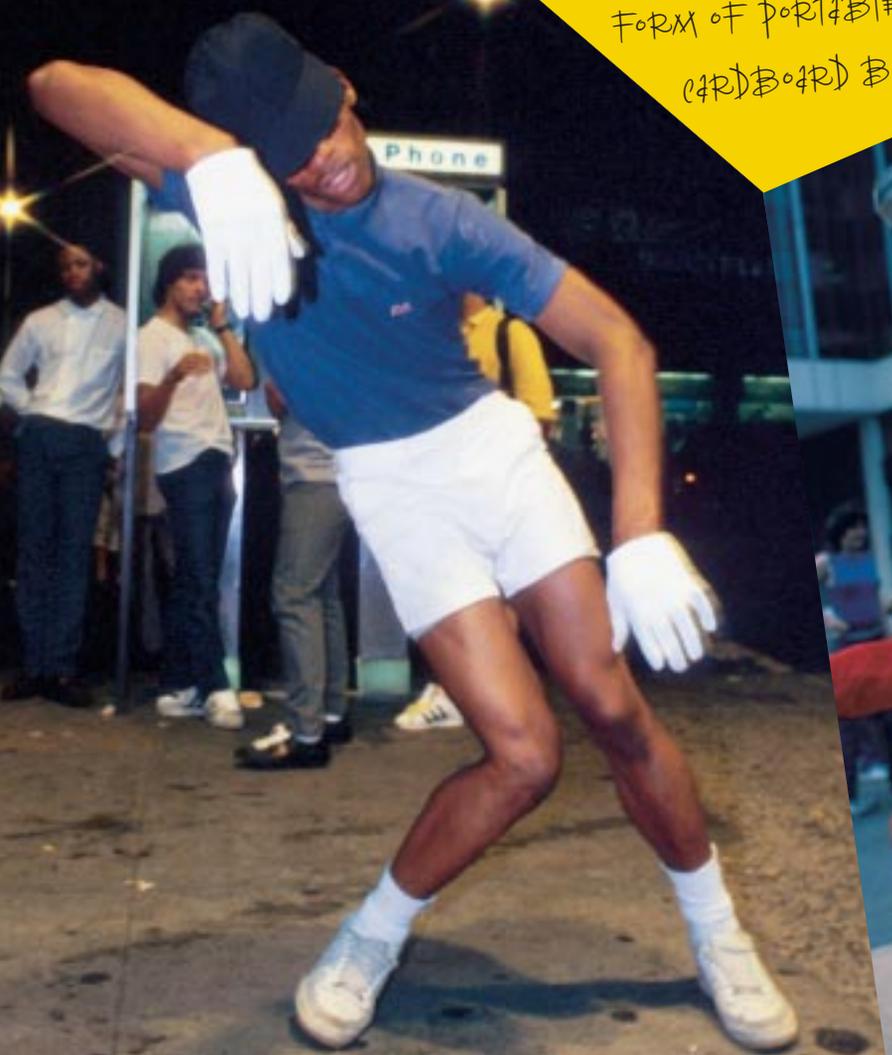
Rennie Harris Puremovement performing *Freeze—Mid High Low*. Rennie Harris's high impact dance company expands the boundaries of concert dance through the African American tradition and the energy and spirit of the Hip Hop.



Stepping is a dance form that arose out of fraternity and sorority song and dance rivalry on Black college campuses. In a step show, teams from these Greek letter organizations compete in dance, with each using trademark moves or insignia. The performances incorporate community solidarity, percussion, polyrhythms, competition, improvisation, use of special objects, line formations, and other African dance characteristics.

The step team from N.C. Central University's Kappa Kappa Psi fraternity.

The urban dances created, like Locking and Popping, the Robot, and the Electric Boogie, were rich in pantomime, grounded in community culture, filled with individual creativity, and performed in competition. Breakin' expressed the individual through improvisation. Dancers even used a contemporary form of portable shingle, the cardboard base. The urban dances created, like Locking and Popping, the Robot, and the Electric Boogie, were rich in pantomime, grounded in community culture, filled with individual creativity, and performed in competition. Breakin' expressed the individual through improvisation. Dancers even used a contemporary form of portable shingle, the cardboard base.





African American Dance in Recent Musicals and Movies

CONTEMPORARY MUSICALS are incorporating more and more African-based dance. Tap has made a comeback in musicals, for example, making stars of dancers Gregory Hines and Savion Glover. Hip Hop and urban culture are also well represented. Older African American dance and music stars, including Sammy Davis, Jr., Lena Horne, and Duke Ellington, are honored in some of these recent productions.

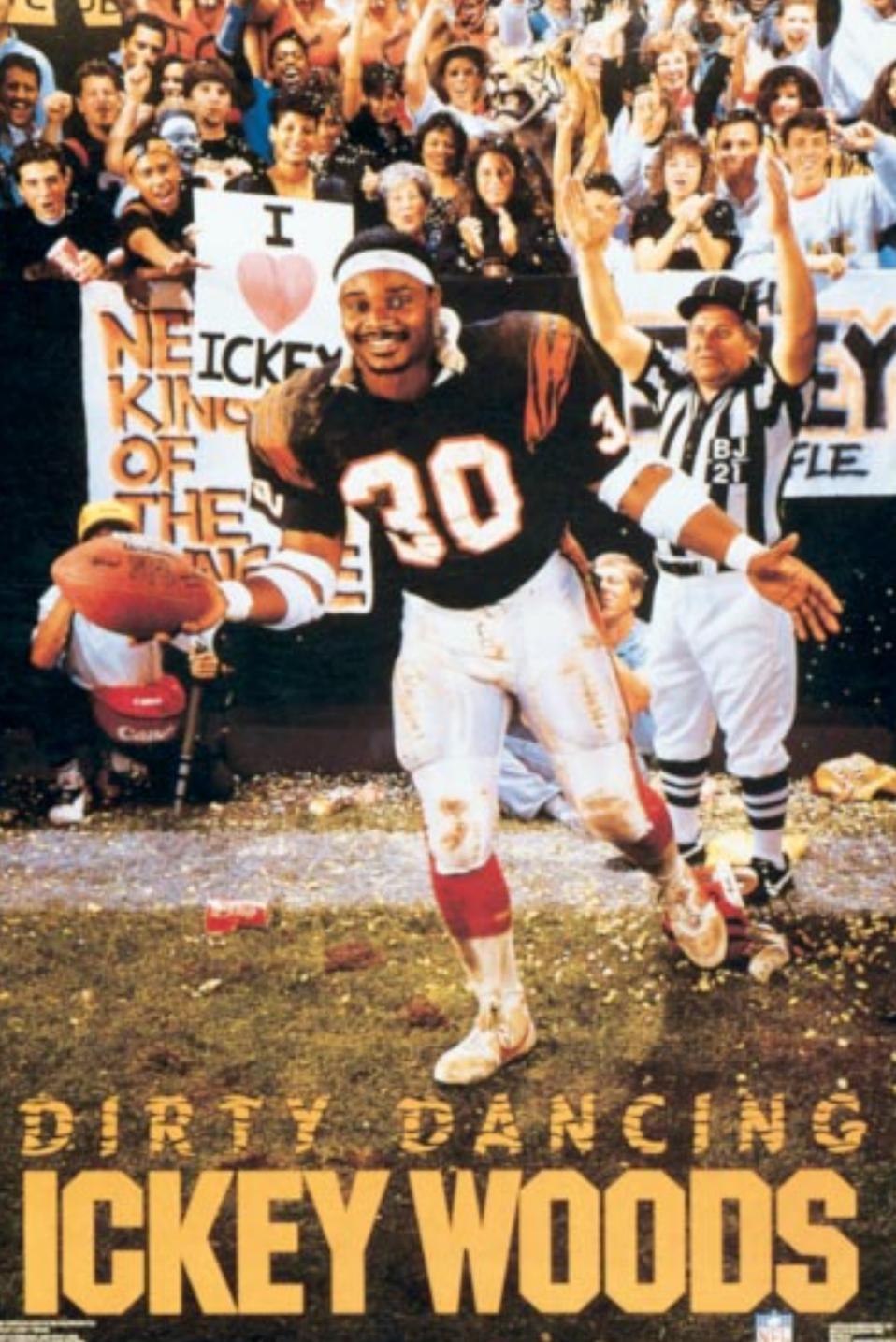
Gregory Hines and Judith Jamison performing in the musical *Sophisticated Ladies*.

Sammy Davis, Jr. performing as Sportin' Life in the movie version of the musical Porgy and Bess.



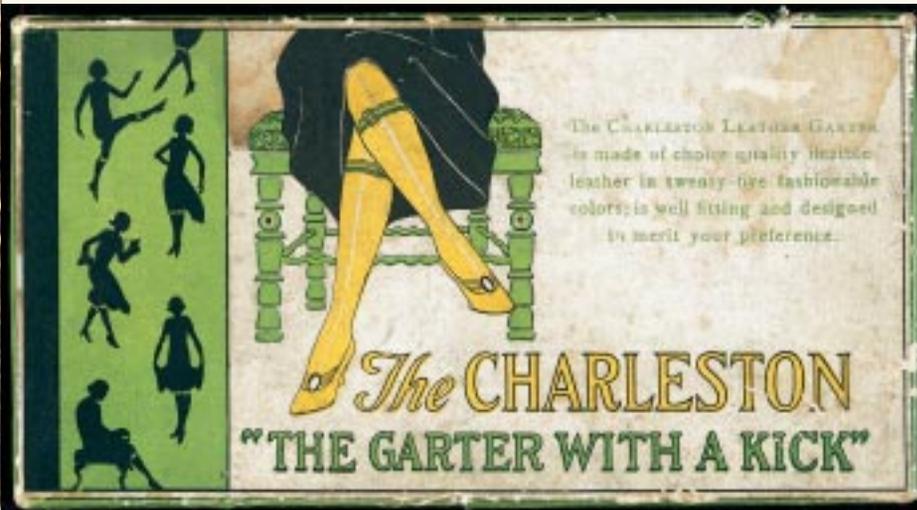
IN THIS TAP MUSICAL, DANCERS DRESS IN HIP HOP-STYLE BAGGY PANTS AND TEE SHIRTS RATHER THAN THE TOP HATS AND TUXEDOS OF YESTERYEAR'S CLASS ACTS. STAR **SAVION GLOVER** EMPHASIZED CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST, SAYING, "WE'RE LOOKING AT THE ROOTS, FROM AFRICAN SHOUTS TO NEW ORLEANS, WHERE PEOPLE STARTED PUTTING BOTTLE CAPS ON THEIR SHOES, WHO DID THE DANCE, HOW IT TRANSFORMED, WHERE IT WENT."





◀ One of the most famous American end-zone dancers is Ickey Woods. He began the practice during his stellar rookie year with the Cincinnati Bengals. Immediately after a touchdown, Woods would turn toward the crowd, stretch out his arms, hop twice to the left and twice to the right, spike the ball, and twirl a finger over his head while rotating his hips and shouting, “Woo, woo!” Called the Ickey Shuffle, this dance became a national craze, with Ickey Woods shirts, songs, and television commercials.

▼ Sellers of all manner of goods have used African American dance to get consumers' attention. In the 1800s, advertisers used Black dancers, often in stereotypical images, to promote products. Since then, advertising items have featured great Black dancers and dances of every decade. This garter box pictures the Charleston.



Dance in Unexpected Settings

IN AFRICA, dance permeates all parts of life. America is embracing the same aesthetic as dance becomes integrated with other arts and leisure activities. Among these are the marching band, athletics, and advertising.

▲ African Americans historically formed marching bands and often marked their performances with African-based rhythms and dance moves. Moreover, the parade is historically an important experience for African Americans, as it established their freedom and right to use the streets. Members of Black marching bands are still known for inserting dance moves into their routines. African American college bands are among the finest examples of this tradition.



Contemporary Concert Dance

IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, African American concert dance expanded and flourished. New companies grew up and achieved prominence. Powerful new works by African American choreographers were performed for enthusiastic audiences in the United States and other countries. Black concert dance often drew on African American history for its themes and exhibited African American dance characteristics.

Rosangela Sylvestre's "Temple in Motion" performed by the **Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble**. Cleo Parker Robinson founded her company in Denver in 1971.



*Judith Jamison in **Alvin Ailey's Cry**. Ailey was a leading American choreographer, and his company was enormously successful, touring the world to perform in dozens of countries. His **Revelations** is considered by many to be the most important choreographed work of the twentieth century. He created this piece, **Cry**, as tribute to African American women, and as a solo for Jamison.*



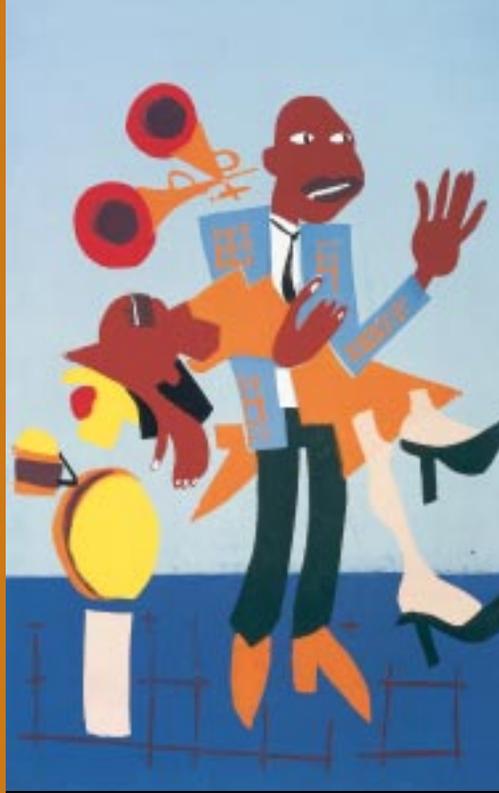
Top left: Stephanie Dabney, in *Firebird* by **Dance Theatre of Harlem**. Courtesy Dance Theatre of Harlem.
Middle left: **Louis Johnson** in the all-Black musical, *House of Flowers* with featured dancers Arthur Mitchell, Geoffrey Holder, Walter Nicks, Donald McKayle, and Albert Popwell. Louis Johnson in *House of Flowers*, 1954. Joe Nash Collection, National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.
Bottom left: Sheri Williams and Shonna Yvette Hickman in the **Dayton Contemporary Dance Company**. ©Greg Glass, AGI, Inc.
Above: Dancer-choreographer **Bill T. Jones** performing *Chatter*. Photo ©Lois Greenfield, 1988.
Below: *Walkin', Talkin', Signifyin' Blues* by the **Philadelphia Dance Company**, founded by Joan Myers Brown in 1970. Brown also founded a school that brought in distinguished dancers and choreographers to teach students. Many African American dance companies, in fact, have grown out of dance schools. ©Deborah Boardman, Philadanco Collection at National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.



AFRICAN AMERICAN
DANCE AROSE FROM
AFRICAN SOURCES,

and retained many African dance characteristics. From the slavery era onward, Black dance attracted the attention of mainstream audiences.

Gradually, African-derived dances crossed the color line and became popular throughout American society. Today, African-based dance movement dominates vernacular American dance.



“When the Spirit Moves: African American Dance in History and Art” is a presentation of the United States Department of State. It is based on “When the Spirit Moves: African American Dance in History and Art,” an exhibit of The National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center.

We gratefully acknowledge all lenders to the exhibit and express special thanks to the following:

MUSEUM EXHIBIT TEAM: Vernon Courtney, Edna Diggs, and Floyd Thomas

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: Glass Clarity, Inc.

VIDEO EDITING AND PRODUCTION: Lake Productions

VIDEO COPYRIGHTS: PHOTOASSIST

ARTISTS:

Richard Yarde, Viola Burley Leak, LaVon Van Williams,
Valerie Maynard, Andrew Turner, Camille Billops,
Richard Hunt, Ademola Olugebefola,
Sam Gilliam and Leah Gilliam.

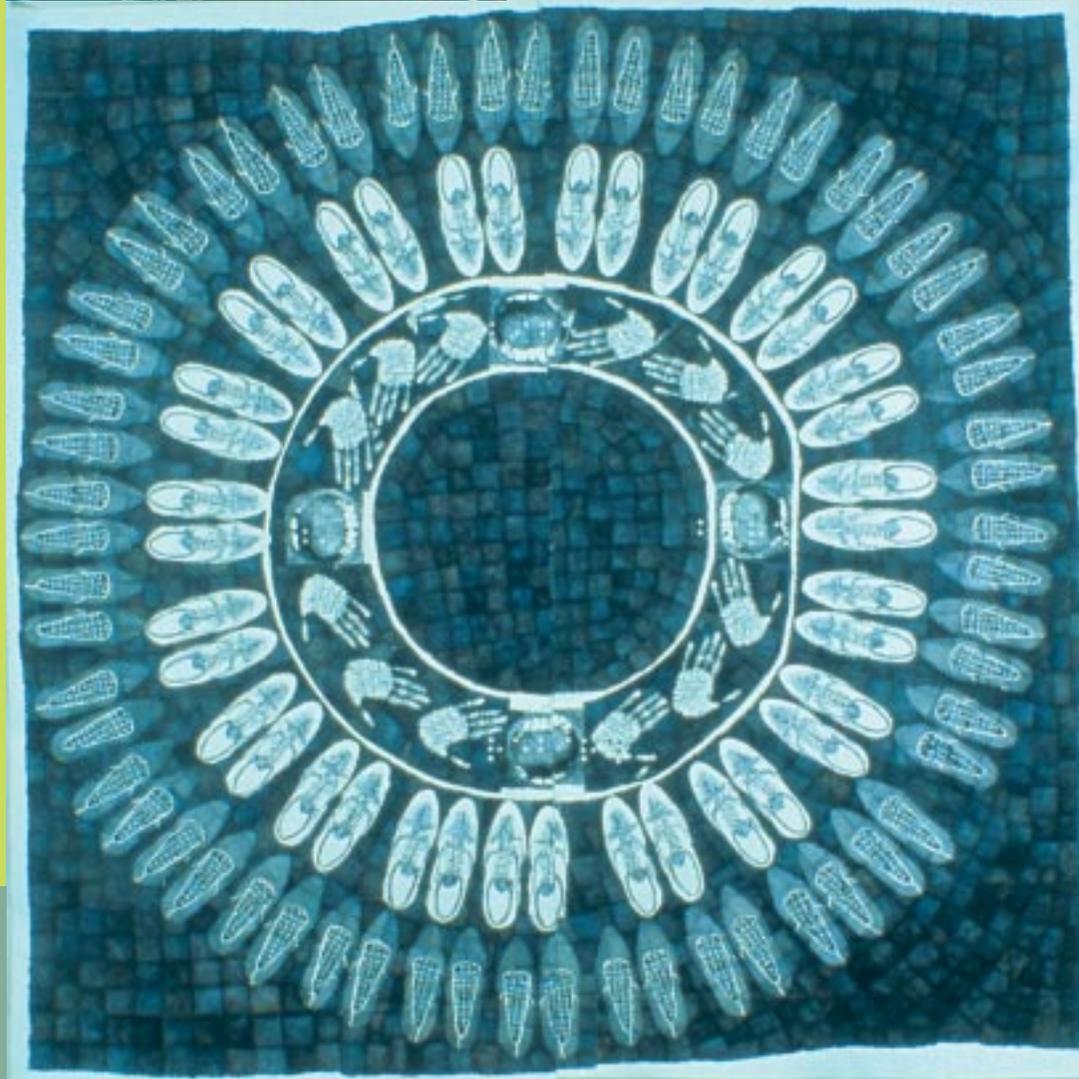
CREDITS FOR THIS DISPLAY:

Evangeline J. Montgomery, *project director*;

Caesar Jackson, *designer*;

Joann Stern, *photo researcher*;

Barbara Glass, *editor*.



Row 1: *Jitterbugs III*, ca. 1940. Silkscreen. William H. Johnson. Courtesy Library of Congress; Getty Images. Row 2: TimePix; ©Fresno Bee. Row 3: *Le Cake-Walk*. Postcard. National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Row 4: *Ring Shout*. Watercolor, 2003. Richard Yarde. Collection of the artist.



Row 1: Gjon Mili/TimePix; *Savoy: It Don't Mean A Thing If It Aint Got That Swing*, 1999. Watercolor. Richard Yarde. Collection of the artist. Row 2: *Afro Dance Scan*. 1999. Mural detail. Viola Burley Leak. Collection of the artist. Row 3: Getty Images; Getty Images. Row 4: *Rent Party*, 1997. Woodcarving. LaVon Van Williams. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Kerry Galleries, Columbus, Ohio. ©Martha Swope. Row 5: *Dancers*, 1999. Slate stone sculpture. Valerie Maynard. Collection of the artist; Ewing Galloway/Index Stock.



Row 1: ©Mark Sadan; *The Ebony Bridal*, ca. 1880. Print. Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly. Barbara Glass Collection. Row 2: Gjon Mili/TimePix; *Cheek to Cheek*, 1997. Acrylic on canvas. Andrew Turner. Collection of Mr. James H. Brown. Courtesy Sande Webster Gallery. Courtesy National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center. Row 3: *Remember Vienna, III*. 1983. Ceramic sculpture. Camille Billops. Collection of the artist. ©CORBIS; *Dancing Figure*, 1959. Cast bronze sculpture. Richard Hunt. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Darrell Walker. Row 4: *Katherine Dunham & Dandridge*, 2002. Acrylic on birch construction. Sam Gilliam. Collection of the artist. Gjon Mili/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.